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FAS Holds Food Safety Seminars in Fukuoka and Hokkaido

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Approved By:

Michael Conlon

Prepared By:

Shirit Stern; Stephen Wixom; Suguru Sato; Midori Iijima; Chika Motomura; Yasuko Marui

Report Highlights:

In September 2009, FAS Japan held food safety seminars in Fukuoka and Hokkaido, Japan. The topics covered in these seminars ranged from the safety and quality of U.S. food, risk analysis, and the importance of educating the public about food safety and risk.

General Information:

Introduction

FAS Japan is in the midst of initiating a new era of market development in Japan, in which we are showcasing American food and agriculture to the Japanese public by educating them on the reliability, safety, and high quality of American food products and by promoting the United States as the most dynamic food culture in the world.

With these objectives in mind, FAS Japan arranged seminars on September 16 in Fukuoka and on September 18 in Sapporo. The objectives of the seminars were for the audience to:

1. Gain an appreciation for the safety and quality of U.S. foods, and accept the U.S. Food Safety System as being at least equal to the food safety system and quality control in Japan.
2. Better understand what does and does not constitute food related risk, and the consumer's role in assuring food safety.
3. Learn how to effectively communicate with the public about food safety and risk; including the importance of discerning between unsubstantiated fears and actual food safety risks.

The audience mainly consisted of representatives from the food industry, including importers and buyers connected with regional supermarket chains. Distributors, retailers, health officials, food safety professionals, and members of the Japanese media also attended the seminars.



The Seminars:

FUKUOKA: The seminar was held at the Fukuoka American Center on Wednesday, September 16. The day started off with Consul General Margot Carrington offering opening remarks. Next, Jun Kamoshida, the Japan representative of Western Growers (an organization that represents over

3,000 producers in California and Arizona), spoke on food safety measures and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) employed in the United States by the horticultural industry.

The next speaker was Stephen Wixom, Agricultural Attaché from FAS Tokyo, speaking about food safety and the concept of risk. The presentation emphasized that the majority of food safety illnesses in Japan are not connected with food safety regulations such as those governing pesticide use in the production stage or even food safety violations by producers, but rather more likely to be connected with food borne illness as a result of mishandling of food in the home, distribution, or retail sector.

The featured speaker of the Fukuoka seminar was Ms. Emi Gamo, a specialist in the risk communication realm of food safety. She is a member of Japan's Food Safety Commission and has published several books dealing with related topics. Her presentation in regards to proper risk communication was very well received, especially with representatives of the Japanese government attending the event.

SAPPORO: The second seminar was held at a hotel in Sapporo on Friday, September 18. The evening prior to the event FAS hosted a dinner with seminar speakers, representatives from the Sapporo Consulate, and key members from a major food retailer in Hokkaido. The following day at the seminar Consul General Donna Welton provided opening remarks. The first presentation was again offered by Western Growers and highlighted U.S. producers' strict adherence to pesticide regulations. The second speaker was Dr. Suguru Sato, Agricultural Specialist from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. He spoke on food safety and risk, and working to overcome the common Japanese misconception of the U.S. food being less safe and of lesser quality than domestically produced foods. The goal of the presentation was for the audience to reach an understanding of the U.S. food system, and to promote trust in U.S. food products. Another important point Dr. Sato emphasized was the concept that Japan importing U.S. food does not put Japan in a dependent position. The talk was intended to demonstrate that importing U.S. food products allows for a diversity of product and the opportunity to learn from others' creative food ideas. To further that point, Dr. Sato referenced a fact little known in Japan that the United States, which is fully self-sufficient in food products, in addition to being the largest food exporter is also the largest importer of food in the world.

The concluding speaker at this seminar was again Ms. Emi Gamo, speaking about the importance of proper risk communication and the responsibility of teaching consumers to think critically about food safety and avoid sensationalist rhetoric that can mislead consumers to think that the food supply is not safe. Following a question and answer session there was a reception to allow

attendees to network and ask further questions of the speakers.



Results

FAS Japan accomplished its goals with these two seminars. Questionnaire feedback following the seminars indicated that the event met or exceeded the majority of participants' expectations. Seminar attendees demonstrated an interest in learning more about GAP, pesticide and safety issues, risk communication, sales promotion activities and promotion tools. With the information learned in these seminars, Japanese importers and buyers should be better equipped to communicate to the public on the actions they can take to ensure food safety. Seminar attendees will also have an increased comprehension and understanding of the safety and quality of U.S. foods, and be better able to differentiate between what constitutes actual food related risks from unnecessary fears.

FAS succeeded with these seminars in terms of developing new regional contacts with the industry in an area not often visited by U.S. agriculture professionals. FAS personnel were able to network with new or less-visited companies and buyers, and created new trade relationships for the future that we hope will eventually pay off in terms of increased sales of U.S. food products.

Through the seminars FAS reached a number of people in the industry that have the potential to influence many more Japanese consumers; and did so in a very cost-effective manner. The audience was right on target in terms of company representation and with seventy-five people (30 in Fukuoka and 45 in Sapporo not including seminar speakers or consulate/FAS personnel) attending met the goals for the number of participants

FAS was also able to develop a closer relationship with Department of State representatives in the Consulates in both Fukuoka and Sapporo. Increased U.S. inter-agency cooperation is important to FAS' work in Japan but also benefits the effectiveness and efficiency of the U.S.-Japan relationship. Developing relations with officers in regions where FAS does not have direct representation will allow us more opportunity to collaborate on and gather information for our analysis and reporting. FAS looks forward to working closely with members of the Department of State again in the future.

Food Safety Seminar in Fukuoka

Total number of attendees: 30

Total number of questionnaire replied: 25

1) Allocation of time

Too long	appropriate	Too short	No answer
	22	1	2

2) Are you satisfied with the seminar in general?

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	No answer
9	10	3			3

3) Was the presentation easy to understand?

Mr. Kamoshda

Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult	No answer
3	19	3			

Mr. Wixom

Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult	No answer
2	13	9	1		

Ms Gamo

Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult	No answer
14	7	3			1

4) Did the information provided by the presentation meet your expectation?

Mr. Kamoshida

More than	As expected	Neutral	Not as	Less than expected	No answer
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expected			expected		
3	17	3	2		

Mr. Wixom

More than expected	As expected	Neutral	Not as expected	Less than expected	No answer
1	12	9	3		

Ms Gamo

More than expected	As expected	Neutral	Not as expected	Less than expected	No answer
9	9	6			1

5) Please mark the information would you like to have in the future (multiple choices)

US GAP	10
Pesticide and other safety issues	13
HACCP	1
Risk Communication	10
Sales Promotion Activities, Promotion Tools	10
Other	² Would like to know the standards of U.S. GAP. Would like to have another seminar like this

Food Safety Seminar in Sapporo

Total number of attendees: 45

Total number of questionnaire replied: 26

Seminar in Hokkaido				
1) Allocation of time				
Too long	Appropriate	Too short		
0	24	2		
2) Was the presentation easy to understand?				
Mr. Kamoshida				
Very easy to follow	Easy to follow	Average	Difficult to follow	Very difficult to follow
11	13	2	0	0
Ms. Gamo				
Very easy to follow	Easy to follow	Average	Difficult to follow	Very difficult to follow
14	10	2	0	0
Dr. Sato				
Very easy to follow	Easy to follow	Average	Difficult to follow	Very difficult to follow
7	15	3	1	0

3) Did the information provided by the presentation meet your expectation?				
Mr. Kamoshida				
More than expected	As expected and Sufficient	Average	Somewhat insufficient	Insufficient
6	15	5	0	0
Ms. Gamo				
More than expected	As expected and Sufficient	Average	Somewhat insufficient	Insufficient
7	16	2	1	0
Dr. Sato				
More than expected	As expected and Sufficient	Average	Somewhat insufficient	Insufficient
3	18	2	2	0
4) Please mark the information would you like to have in the future (multiple choices)				
US Ag Products Safety, GAP Related	13			
Pesticide and General Safety	10			
HACCP	8			
Risk Communication	10			
Sales Promotion	10			
Other	5	Introduction of GAP to Japan; public acceptance of biotech food; how to communicate with consumers; the labeling of food products; GAP and food safety regulation in the United States.		